1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

the ages of fifty and thirty; the remaining seven are between twenty and thirty and for them there is still some chance of producing a child, for though copulation normally starts at or before puberty the average age for bearing the first child (worked out from the women of Lingthem) is over twenty-two; there are only three instances of a woman bearing a child before she was twenty. Most exceptionally for a primitive community it was possible in Zongu to get the exact age of every individual for the following reason. It is absolutely essential for participation in all lamaist ceremonies for every Lepcha to know in which year of the twelve-year 'animal' cycle[17] they were born, for this affects birth and marriage, the diagnosis of disease, the suitability or otherwise of individual exorcists, and many other occasions in ordinary life. Also after he has completed his third (or exceptionally his fourth) cycle—that is to say when he is 36 or 48—it is obligatory for a Lepcha to make prophetic consultation as to the hazards and misfortunes which await him in the next twelve years. Although no Lepcha can state his age in years, everybody knows their 'animal' year, and with few exceptions, which can be checked by cross-reference, the number of cycles they have completed.

I have not been able to make up my mind as to the reason for the great sterility of the Lepchas. It would seem as though it were the women rather than the men who were sterile, for in the greater number of cases of a man remarrying on account of his first wife's sterility the second wife has borne him children. A suggestion put forward by some Lepchas with whom I discussed the matter, though others considered it absolutely ludicrous, is that sterility may be due to premature copulation. The Lepchas do not recognise and have no word for physical puberty, and most of them believe that the signs of female puberty (swelling of the breasts and beginning of menses) are the result of copulation and that therefore girls have to be copulated with in order that they may develop. A number of people admitted (if they were women) copulating with men when they were only ten or eleven, or (if they were men) more or less raping young girls. A number of the sterile women however emphatically deny such premature experience, and I have no reason to suppose they were lying; and anyhow on the medical evidence it seems doubtful whether such premature experience would cause subsequent sterility, though it might render childbirth more difficult.

[17] This will be more fully explained in the next chapter; see also Appendix III.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

773 *verbatim*, though not necessarily to an audience, by the Sacrificer
539 on the second day of the marriage feast. I am giving a somewhat
581 shortened version of it in an Appendix,[8] but there are one or two points to which I should like to draw attention. Tarbong-bo, the inventor of marriage, was Itpomu's youngest son, and was still drinking her milk when he saw, desired and tried to rape Na-rip-nom; when he failed in this because he had not given the proper presents his mother sent him to his elder brother Komsi*thing* for
● [881] advice and help. It will be noticed that there is no sort of transition or *rite de passage* between the child and the boy of marrying age; and that the elder brother, and not the father or paternal or maternal uncle is the natural person for a young man to turn to for help and advice. In the Mun mythology the father is never important; Débu, the husband of Itpomu, is merely a name, without personality or independent existence; it seems possible that he is a relatively modern importation. I think the same is possibly true of Tak-bo-*thing*, the grandchild of Itpomu and the child of Narzong-*nyou* (sometimes his father is Komsi*thing*, sometimes some other male supernatural); Tak-bo-*thing* is simultaneously a supernatural and the first human being and a great number of stories are told about him, chiefly to explain the origin of different human customs; but he is inextricably confused with Tashey-*thing* or Guru Rimpuché, and it seems to me probable that he is to a very great extent a Tibetan import, though probably anterior to the Lepcha's conversion to lamaism.

756 The chief supernaturals of the Mun are the two feminine deities
776 Itpomu and Narzong-*nyou*. Itpomu herself is never directly invoked; it is always her creations who are sacrificed and prayed to. Narzong-*nyou* is really the chief Lepcha goddess; she is as it were the local God of Sikkim, of the Lepchas' country; she lived in the country and is responsible for its geography, flora, and, especially fauna. She is also responsible for a great number of institutions. Her elder brother and husband Komsi*thing* is also responsible for a number of habits and institutions, but he is in a way a foreigner; after he and his wife separated he took himself to Tibet. Except in the harvest rites the two of them are always mentioned in prayers and sacrifices, together with all the other supernaturals involved. The invocation usually takes hours, for all the relevant gods in all their manifestations, with their wives and their children must be mentioned by name; in private sacrifices

[8] See Appendix IV.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER TWELVE

SEX, MARRIAGE AND MATURITY

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On the question of attaining sexual maturity the Lepchas differentiate between men and women far more overtly than they do in any other phase of the life cycle. Theoretically they ignore physical puberty, have no word or words to express it, and pay no sort of formal attention to its arrival. With males the achievement of full sexual potency is considered to be a slow maturing process, taking place automatically over a period of years, with actual puberty marking, as it were, a half-way stage; though most boys produce emissions from about the age of fifteen, they are not considered to have achieved full potency till from three to five years later. With women, on the other hand, the physical signs of puberty—the beginning of menses and the swelling of the breasts—are believed only to occur through the external influence either of a man or of a supernatural named Kandoo *moong*. It is thought that normally a virgin girl will not menstruate nor will her breasts swell; these physical alterations only take place after copulation. It does, however, occasionally—though, it is thought, rarely—happen that a virgin starts menstruating; this indicates a visit of the supernatural Kandoo *moong*, and is considered to be a sign of good luck; some of the older women boasted that they had thus been signalled by this supernatural. The majority of women, however, depend on the intervention of a man; the physical signs will start whenever a girl experiences copulation, and there is therefore no stigma attached to grown men forcing little girls of nine or ten, and this does occur occasionally. It is possible that this cultural explanation of physiological processes masks a deep-seated male envy of the more conspicuous and dramatic life-giving functions of women and an attempt to make them appear dependent on male intervention. It would seem that this notion is at the base of the initiatory rites in many tribes of New Guinea and Australia, where

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

881 through ritual and symbolism men attempt to arrogate to themselves women's physiological functions; perhaps the most striking of these rites is the urethral sub-incision practised by some Australian tribes. Since, unfortunately, nothing is known of the other Mongolian peoples of the Himalayas, it is impossible to state whether this notion is peculiar to the Lepchas, or whether it is shared by their Northern neighbours. The Hindus and the Nepali converts to Hinduism stress overtly the rivalry between the sexes, and adduce the inferiority of women through their magically dangerous and infectious functions of menstruation and child-birth.

886 Just as there is no formally marked beginning of sexual life, so there is no formally marked end of it. The menopause is ignored; the dream of copulation with a supernatural, which marks the menses, is meant to continue after it; and sexual pleasure is considered to be equally strong at any period of life. There appears to be no fear of impotence; sexual appetite and an appetite for food are openly equated, and it is considered that, except through illness or old age, the loss of one is as unlikely as the loss of the other.

833 Some men make a distinction between pre-puberty and post-puberty sexual activity, but this distinction is personal and not cultural. Most men, when talking of their past lives, emphasise what was their first 'real' sexual experience; but some place this first experience very early, at the age of eleven or twelve. I think the operative distinction in the mind of the Lepcha is whether the sexual adventure formed part of a play, or was undertaken seriously for its own sake.

582 584 [833] Lepcha society gives the children a sexual rôle very early; girls are betrothed and occasionally married from the age of eight onwards, and boys from the age of twelve. In Lingthem it seems as though this very early age for betrothal has been somewhat raised in recent years; Mrs. Datoop and one or two other of the elder women in the community were betrothed at the age of eight and married shortly after; but in 1937 there was no betrothed girl aged less than twelve, nor was any young man betrothed to a girl under that age. It is quite probable that this change in the age of betrothal is local and temporary; the Lepchas did not consider that the situation had altered in any way. Even today most young people are betrothed before or at any rate as soon as they arrive at physical puberty, and consequently enter that state with an already selected sexual partner. In 1937 the only unbetrothed girl over thirteen was Prumtu; there were eight boys over sixteen un-

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

knew that his daughter (now aged twelve) was having 833
relations with a man; but he would not like her to give birth
to a bastard, on account of the possible harm to the crops.
Neither he nor his wife has spoken to her on the subject, nor
is this ever done. Incidentally, it may be noted that the [827
swelling of a young girl's breasts is not thought to be a sign of 881]
puberty, for which there is indeed no special name, but
an indication that she has commenced to have sexual
relations.

Masturbation is not, of course, unknown, but is seldom 839
indulged in by reason of the fact that women are available
from the earliest moment that a boy feels the need of sex.
The general opinion is that it is slightly silly and rather
funny.

The average married Lepcha has sexual relations with his 833
wife at least once every night, but abstinence is thought to
cause no harm, and indeed makes one fat and healthy. It
should be noted, however, that abstinence is interpreted as
meaning having sexual relations only once in every three or
four days. Tafoor now considers himself a very continent
man, but says that when he first married he usually copulated
with his wife seven or eight times every night. In his opinion
men are not much interested in the sexual act after the age of
sixty or sixty-five; but women continue to take pleasure in the
operation up to the time they die. The menopause seems to [886]
be hardly recognised and certainly does not result in any sort
of psychological disturbance such as seems to be common
among European women. It is realised that after a certain
age women cease to conceive, but there is no break in their
sexual activities. It may be that because of this no attempt is
made to restrain the sex life of the young; for since there is no
break in the sex life of the parents the question of jealousy,
once again, does not arise, as I believe it does in our own
civilisation. But this is a matter for the psychologists to
decide.

Contraception is unknown; nor are aphrodisiacs in general 832
use. It is said, however, that the flesh of a bird called *Ken fo*, [842]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

own. The child gets its bone from the father's semen, and its flesh from the mother's vaginal secretions. The food eaten by the mother causes the fœtus to grow; but once the baby is completely formed inside the womb it feeds on its mother's menstrual blood, which explains why the menses cease during pregnancy. 843

It is generally believed that a girl has her first menses about one month after she copulates for the first time, even though she be only nine or ten years old. Nothing is done or said at such a time; nor on any later occasion is any kind of special clothing or bandage worn. This is the origin of menstruation: 881

In olden times menstruation was confined to men, who used to bleed from the knees. In view of their normal occupations, working in the fields, hunting, and so on, this was very inconvenient, since the blood dripped all over the place. Nazong Nyu noticed this and wondered what he could do to remedy it. 773 539 841

Now in those days the female genitalia were situated in the middle of the forehead. Nazong thought this did not look very nice and decided to change the position. He summoned some bulbuls and told them to peck out the women's parts and replant them in their chins. This they did; but after a time Nazong still did not think the general effect was very pleasing. He summoned the birds again and told them to move the parts to the women's chests; but still he was not satisfied. Finally he had them moved to the place where they now are; and seeing that they were suitably hidden beneath the women's clothing he decided that it would be more convenient if women menstruated instead of men. As a result of this arrangement the women started to bleed periodically from that very day, and the bulbul still has a blood-red spot on its tail: this it acquired when it was carrying out Nazong Nyu's orders.

One day when I was talking to Karma we were all laughing rather loudly at some remark when there was a 821 831

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

circle, but either alternative seems possible."[110] And Gorer himself writes: "The Lepchas are much occupied with sex; it is the subject to much of their conversation and nearly all their humour; it is regarded as almost as essential as food. Sex is intended to be almost exclusively sensual and almost impersonal; the culture makes no allowance for deep personal relationships passionately adhered to between sexual partners."[111]

In the first place we maintain that the sex instinct, the instinct that prompts a man to propagate his own kind, is a very strong one, natural to all peoples, and the Rong are no exceptions. It cannot be said of them that they are passionate in an extreme manner. The relationship that exists between male and female among all Asiatic peoples is different from that which prevails among the Europeans. The same is true of man and wife within the bond of marriage. The Lepchas are in no way alien to the general Asiatic picture. The method Gorer adopts to demonstrate his theory is wrong. He puts together the love affairs of a few individual Lepchas and with one unwarranted generalization he regards it as the average sexual standard of all Lepchas. Anyone could draw a similar picture of every nationality in the world if one would collect the "Chronique scandaleuse" of separate individuals and present it under the title "Sex Life of the Nation."[111a]

Gorer moreover states that the Lepchas believe or pretend to believe that puberty of girls, the development of breasts and menstruation occur only through sexual relationship with a man or a supernatural creature, the Kandu Mung, who is supposed to appear to the girl in order to make her sexually mature. This, of course, would very rarely occur. Most girls about nine or ten years of age would have to be raped. It would appear that the men invented this story to make the women dependent on them, particularly if the female desired puberty to come on. This belief of Gorer however we could not ascertain in the very places where Gorer carried out his research. All the same we were able to check on it

110. op. cit. p. 27.
111. op. cit. p. 332.
111a. G. S. Ghurye, Sexual Behaviour of the American Female, Sociological Bulletin, Bombay 1954, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 158 sq.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

in other places. The Rong women are not so simple as to be taken in by such a man-made legend. They, on the contrary, affirm that the sexual maturity of girls and the development of the secondary sex characteristics occur without sexual relationship with man. The only difference is that the breasts of the girl who had had sexual relationship with man would produce some milk. The Maharaja of Sikkim and other educated Sikkimese, who read Gorer's book, found his description to be a defamation of the Lepcha character.

The Lepchas are the descendants of the first brother Lepcha, as reported above. They fall into three divisions, which are named after the districts in which they live. The Ilame Lepchas live in the Ilame district of Nepal; the Dandjung Lepchas on the other side of the Tista river in Sikkim; the Dam-sang Lepchas in Indian Sikkim and Bhutan. The second brother was called God-she, and is the father of the Jimdar tribe. The third was Meche, and he is the protoparent of the Meche. Each of these three have a different language.[112]

B. Sikkim Yak-tamba

There is in Sikkim a class of people who are called Limbu by the Nepalese and Tzong-pa by the Tibetans. They call themselves Yak-tamba, Ek-tamba and Ek-tambu. Tradition has it that, after the Lepchas, they are the oldest inhabitants of the place having settled there before the Tibetans and the Nepalese came to settle in the land. They are intermixed with the Rong in a very remarkable manner. At the present time they inhabit the land to the west as far as the river Arun as we have already pointed out before. They are regarded as divisions of the Limbu and bear a very close resemblance to them. The Yak-tamba have flatter faces and more Mongoloid features than the Lepchas.

C. The Bhodja of Sikkim

The Tibetans who migrated into Sikkim are called the Sikkim Bhodja. Legend links the Tibetan Je-khye-bu-

112. cfr. the report of the Rai given above concerning the first parents and their three sons; see p. 7, 38. Here we have the same content of the myth.

[pp. 110 – 159 not processed]